

AN
ANSWER
OF A
LETTER

From a
Gentleman in Fife,
TO A
NOBLEMAN

CONTAINING

A brief Account of the Barbarous and illegal Treatment, these poor Women accused of Witchcraft, met with from the Bailies of *Pittenweem* and others, with some few Observations thereon. ...

To which is added

An Account of the horrid and Barbarous Murder, in a Letter from a Gentleman in *Fife*, to his Friend in *Edinburgh*, February 5th. 1705.

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An Answer of a Letter from a Gentleman in
Fife, &c.

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MY LORD,

Bochrane gift

I Reckon my self very much honoured by your Lordships Letter, desiring me to write you an Account of that horrible Murder committed in *Pittenweem*; I doubt not, but by this time, your Lordship has seen the Gentleman's Letter to his Friend thereanent: I refer you to it, the Author thereof being so well inform'd, and so ingenuous, that I'll assure you there is nothing in it, but what is generally talk'd, and believed to be true.

All I can contribute to your Lordship's further Information, shall be by way of a brief Narrative of the Baillies and Minister's unwarrantable imprisoning, and barbarous treating of the Poor Women.

I need not write your Lordship a Character of *Patrick Morton*, being now sufficiently known for a Cheat.

It was upon his Accusation alleynally the Minister and Baillies imprisoned these poor Women, and set a Guard of drunken Fellows about them, who by pinching and Pricking some of them with Pins and Elsons, kept them from sleep for several Days and Nights together; the Marks whereof were seen by severals a month thereafter; this cruel Usage made some of them learn to be so wise, as acknowledge every Question that was ask'd them; whereby they found the Minister and Baillies well pleas'd, and themselves better treated.

Notwithstanding of all this, some of the more Foolish, continued, as the Minister said, hardened in the Devil's Service, such as *White, Jack, Wallace, Patrick*, and others: All which, save the first, were ordered to the Stocks, where they lay for several Weeks.

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All this, while *Patrick Morton's* melancholly Fancy (to give it no harsher Term) being too much encouraged by severals, and particularly by the Minister's reading to him the Case of *Barrengarran's* Daughter, continued roving after a wonderful manner, accusing for his Tormenters, some of the most considerable Mens Wives in the Town, but such as the Minister and Baillies durst not venture to imprison. By this your Lordship may see, it was only the weakest that went to the Walls.

My Lord *Roths* accompanied with several Gentlemen of good Sense and Reputation, came to *Pittenweem*, where finding these poor Women's Confessions nowise satisfying, and *Patrick Morton* a Cheat, informed the Privy Council thereof, who sent an Order to send *Patrick* over to them.

This Turn being given; and *Patrick* finding, that things were not likely to go so favourably with him as he before fancied, began to draw to his Breeches; and in a short time recovered his former Health, in which he still continues. By this time the Baillies began to be as earnest in emptying their Prisons, as ever they were forward in filling them: So after a long and serious Deliberation, they set them at Liberty: But that their last Step might be as illegal as their first, obliged each of them to pay the Town-Officer, the Sum of 8 *lib. Scots*: To pay which, some of them were forced to sell some Linnen they had reserved for their Dead-Shirts and Wynding-Sheets.

I beg your Lordships further Patience a little to read these few following Observations. *Obs. 1st.* The Baillies and Minister sent and brought severals of these Women from Places without their Jurisdiction; one from *Anstruther*, and another from the Country at 6 Miles distance.

Obs. 2d. What Good could the Minister propose to *Patrick Morton* by reading to him the Book Intituled, *The Case of Barrangarran's Daughter*:

Observ. 3d. After so much Unjustice done these poor Women, the Baillies and Ministers obliged them to pay the Town-

Officer eight Pounds Scots, is worthy of your Lordships, and the rest of the Lords of the Privy Council's Considerations. And it would be the height of Charity, to fall on a method to oblige the Minister and Baillies to resound it seven-fold.

Obs. 5th. One *Thomas Brown* the only Man accused by *Patrick Mortoun*, and imprison'd by the Minister and Baillies, after a great deal of hunger and hardship, died in Prison. So as this poor Womans Murther was not the first, neither will it be the last, unless by severe Punishments prevented.

Obs. 5th. The Baillies in a manner justified these two Murthers by their not allowing them Christian Burial, but burying them like dogs, scarce covered them from the ravens.

Obs. 6th. You may wonder why all along I should say the Minister and Baillies? The reason is, because during all this Narrative he exercis'd more of the Civil Authority than any of the Baillies, and so continues to do, as you may see by this following late Instance.

The Baillies of *Pittenweem* being conven'd before the Lords of Privy-Council on the 14th or 15th of *February*, I am inform'd, gave in to them a subscribed Account of the Murther; and to justify themselves, assert they had imprison'd severals of the Murtherers before they left *Pittenweem*. It is very true they did so, but they were not long from the Town, when the Minister set them at liberty. This I think is exercising the Office of a Civil Magistrate. Perhaps the Minister may say, he did it by the Magistrat's Order left behind them; then I think the Magistrats were mightily in the wrong to give in to the Lords of the Privy-Council an Account they knew to be false.

My Lord, This is not the tenth part of what may be said upon this Subject; I hope some other Person will be more particular.

I am,

MT LORD,

Your Lordships most humble Servant.

*An Account of an horrid and barbarous Murder,
in a Letter from a Gentleman in Fife, to his
Friend in Edinburgh.*

S I R,

I Doubt not of your being exceedingly Surpriz'd with this short and Just Account I give you, of a most Barbarous Murder committed in *Pittenweem* the 30th. of *January* last. One *Peter Morton* a Blacksmith in that Town, after a long Sickness, pretended that Witches were Tormenting him, that he did see them and know them: And from time to time, as he declared such and such Women to be Witches, they were by Order of the Magistrates and Ministers of *Pittenweem*, apprehended as such, to a very considerable Number, and put into Prison. This Man by his odd Postures and Fits, which seem'd to be very Surprising at first, wrought himself into such a Credit with the People of that Place; that unless the Earl of *Rothes*, our Sheriff, had discover'd his Villany, and discouraged that Practice, God knows how Fatal it might have prov'd to many Honest Families of Good Credit and Respect. Sir, However, at first many were deceived, yet now all Men of Sense are asham'd for giving any Credit to such a Person. But how hard it is to Root out bad Principles once Espous'd by the Rabble; and how dangerous a Thing it is to be at their Mercy, will appear by the Tragical Account I give you of one of these poor Women *Janet Corphat*.

After she was committed Prisoner to the Tolbooth, upon a Suspicion of her being a Witch: She was well guarded with a Number of Men, who by Pinching her, and pricking her with Pins, kept her from Sleep many Days and Nights, threatening her with present Death, unless she would confess her self Guilty of Witch-craft, which at last she did. This Report spreading abroad, made People curious to Converse with her upon the Subject, who found themselves exceedingly disappointed. The Viscount of *Primrose* being in *Fife* occasionally, inclin'd to satisfy his Curiosity in this matter, the Earl of *Kellie*,

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my Lord Lyon, the Laird of *Scots-Talbot*, and the Laird of *Randerston* were with his Lordship in *Pittenweem*. Three of the Number went to the Tolbooth and Discours'd her, to whom she said, that all that she had confessed, either of her self, or her Neighbours, were Lies, and cry'd out, *God forgive the Minister*, and said he had beat her one day with his Staff, when she was telling him the Truth. They ask'd her how she came to say any thing that was not true; she cry'd out, *Alas, alas, I behoved to say so, to please the Minister and the Baillies*: And in the mean time, she beg'd for Christ's Sake not to tell that she had said so, else she would be murdered. Another time, when the Laird of *Glenagies* and Mr. Bruce of *Kinross*, were telling her, she needed not deny what they were asking her, for she had confessed as much as would infallibly burn her; she cried out, God forbid! And to one of the two she said, that from which he might rationally conclude, she insinuat she had Assurance from the Minister, her Life should not be taken.

A little before Harveft, Mr. Ker of *Kippilaw* a Writer to the Signet being in *Pittenweem*, Mr. Robert Cook Advocat went with him to Prison to see this poor Woman; Mr. Cook among other Questions ask'd her, if she had not renounced her Baptism to the Devil; she answered, she never renounc'd her Baptism but to the Minister. These were her Words, what she meant by them, I know not. The Minister having got Account of this from Mr. Cook, he sent for her, and in presence of Mr. Cook and Mr. Ker in the Church, he threatned her very severely, and commanded the Keeper to put her into some Prison by her self under the Steeple, lest (as he said) she should pervert those who had confessed. The Keeper put her into a Prison in which was a Low Window, out of which it was obvious that any body could make an escape, and accordingly she made her escape that Night.

Next Day when they miss'd her, they made a very slight Search for her, and promised ten pound *Scots* to any Body that would bring her back.

Mr. Gordon Minister of *Leuchars*, hearing she was in his Parish,

Parish, 8 Miles distant from *Pittenweem*, caused apprehend her, and sent her Prisoner, under Custody of two Men, on the 30th of *January*, to Mr. *Comper* Minister of *Pittenweem*, without giving any Notice to the Magistrates of the Place. When she came to Mr. *Comper*, she ask'd him if he had any thing to say to her? he answered, No. She could get Lodging in no House, but with one *Nicolas Lawson*, one of the Women that had been called Witches. Some say a Baillie put her there.

The Rabble hearing she was in Town, went to Mr. *Comper*, and ask'd him what they should do with her? He told them he was not concern'd, they might do what they pleased with her. They took Encouragement from this, to fall upon the poor Woman, those of the Minister's Family going along with him, as I hear; they fell upon the poor Creature immediately, and beat her unmercifully, tying her so hard with a Rope that she was almost strangl'd; they dragg'd her through the Streets, and alongst the Shoar by the heels. A Baillie hearing of a Rabble near his Stair, came out upon them, which made them immediately disappear. But the Magistrates tho' met together, not taking Care to put her into close Custody, for her Safety, the Rabble gathered again immediatly, and stretch'd a Rope betwixt a Ship and the Shoar, to a great height, to which they ty'd her fast; after which they swing'd her to and fro, from one side to another, in the mean time throwing Stones at her from all Corners, until they were weary: Then they loos'd her, and with a mighty Swing threw her upon the hard Sands; all about being ready in the mean time to receive her with Stones and Staves, with which they beat her most cruelly; her Daughter in the time of her Mother's Agony, tho she knew of it, durst not adventure to appear, lest the Rabble had us'd her after the same manner, being in a House, in great Concern and Terror out of Natural Affection for her Mother: (About which the Author was misinform'd in the first Edition.) They laid a heavy Door upon her, with which they prest her so sore, that she cried out, to let her up for *Christ's* sake, and she would tell the Truth: But when they

they did let her up, what they could not satisfy them; and therefore they again shut the Door, and with a heavy weight of Stones on it, pressed her to Death: And to be sure it was so, they called a Mill with a Horse and a Sledge, and made him drive over her Corp backward and forward several times. When they were sure she was killed outright, they dragged her miserable Carcass to *Nicolas Lowson's House*, where they first found her.

There was a Motion made to treat *Nicolas Lowson* after the same manner immediately: But some of them being wearied with three Hours Sport, as they called it, said, It would be better to delay her for another Day's Divertisement; and so they all went off.

It is said, That *Mr. Comper*, in a Letter to *Mr. Gordon*, gave some Rise to all this: And *Mr. Comper*, to vindicate himself, wrote to *Mr. Gordon*; whose Return says, if he were not going to *Edinburgh*, he would give him a Double of his Letter. It's strange, he sent him not the Principal. In the Postscript he assures him, he shall conceal it to Meeting.

'Tis certain, that *Mr. Comper* preaching the Lord's Day immediately after in *Pittenweem*, took notice of the Murder, which at least makes him guilty of sinful Silence. Neither did *Mr. Gordon*, in his Letter to *Mr. Comper*, make any Requite for it: And this some construe to be a Justifying of the horrid Wickedness in both.

We are perswaded, the Government will examine this Affair to the bottom, and lay little Stress upon what the Magistrates or Minister of *Pittenweem* will say to smooth over the Matter; seeing it's very well known, that either of them could have quash'd the Rabble, and prevented that Murder, if they had appeared zealous against it.

I am sorry I have no better News to tell you. God deliver us from those Principles that tend to such Practices.

I am

SIR,

Your Humble Servant.

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